

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1292
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN
USMISSION SINAI
USCINCEUR

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EMO. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MASS, IS, US
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY REACTION TO PACKAGE AIRCRAFT DEAL

1. SUMMARY: ALL PAPERS TODAY CONDEMN U.S.. PROPOSED
PACKAGE SALE OF AIRCRAFT. ALTHOUGH THE DECISION HAD BEEN
EXPECTED HERE FOR SOME DAYS, COMMENT IS GENERALLY LIMITED
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TO THE EDITORIAL PAGES SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT APPARENTLY
CAME TOO LATE FOR THE COLUMNISTS' DEADLINES. (NO DOUBT
COMMENTATORS WILL MORE THAN MAKE UP FOR THEIR DELAY IN COM-
ING DAYS.) PRESS ANTICIPATION OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS
OF THE GENERAL NATURE OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT HOWEVER SEEMS
TO HAVE PREPARED THE PUBLIC FOR THE NEWS AND LOWERED BY A
COUPLE DECIBELS THE MEDIA'S OUTRAGE. NONETHELESS, THE

PAINED REACTION IS UNAMBIGUOUS AND UNIVERSAL. EDITORIALS CONCENTRATE ON THE PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN THE PACKAGE DEAL, NOT ON THE SPECIFICS OF THE PROPOSAL, AND MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS: THE PRECEDENT OF SELLING LETHAL WEAPONS TO EGYPT; THE BAD TIMING OF THE DECISION; AND THE AFFECT IT WILL HAVE ON ISRAEL'S PLANS TO DEVELOP A NEW FIGHTER. END SUMMARY.

2. DAVAR SEES THE SALE TO EGYPT AS MORE THAN MERELY THE PRECEDENT OF THE U.S. FINALLY PROVIDING LETHAL ARMS TO EGYPT, WHICH IN ITSELF IS VIEWED AS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN THE MILITARY USEFULNESS OF F-5S. DAVAR BELIEVES A PRECEDENT HAS ALSO BEEN SET TO LINK FUTURE ARMS SHIPMENTS TO ISRAEL WITH PARALLEL SUPPLIES TO THE CONFRONTATION STATES. POINTING OUT THAT THE U.S. IS NOT THE SOLE SUPPLIER FOR EGYPT AND THE OTHER ARAB STATES, THE HISTADRUT DAILY FEARS "PARALLELISM" COULD HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON THE REGION'S BALANCE OF POWER AS WELL AS ON THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF ARMS ISRAEL WILL RECEIVE. DAVAR CONCLUDES THAT ISRAEL MUST NOW WEIGH THE OPTION OF DEVELOPING ITS OWN NEXT GENERATION FIGHTER.

3. THE JERUSALEM POST (DAVID LANDAU) QUOTES "HIGHLY PLACED SOURCES" AS SUSPECTING THAT THE U.S. DECISION IS INTERWOVEN WITH ITS EVOLVING ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PEACE THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PACKAGE DEAL COINCIDED WITH THE CURRENT SHARP DISPUTE OVER THE SECRETARY'S RECENT STATE-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MENTS ON SINAI SETTLEMENTS AND THE WEST BANK. "BAD TIMING" IS A THEME THAT APPEARS IN ALMOST ALL DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED SALE. UNLIKE THE LANDAU ARTICLE, HOWEVER, THE TIMING IS GENERALLY RELATED TO ISRAEL-EGYPT NEGOTIATIONS AND THE ARGUMENT RUNS THAT AIRCRAFT SHOULD HAVE BEEN PROPOSED FOR EGYPT ONLY AFTER A PEACE SETTLEMENT. (NO ONE OBJECTS TO THE TIMING INSOFAR AS THE SALE TO ISRAEL IS CONCERNED.)

4. OTHER REPORTERS (E.G. YAACOV EREZ IN MAARIV) ALSO ALLUDE TO A POSSIBLE REASSESSMENT OF ISRAEL'S NEGOTIATING POSITION ON SINAI, PARTICULARLY CONCERNING ITS AIRFIELDS, IN THE LIGHT OF THE PACKAGE PROPOSAL. THE POST'S MILITARY CORRESPONDENT, HIRSH GOODMAN, SAYS SENIOR DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT SOURCES EXPRESSED SERIOUS CONCERN THAT THE F-15 SALE TO SAUDI ARABIA WILL UPSET THE BALANCE OF POWER. ALTHOUGH LESS WORRIED ABOUT F-5S FOR EGYPT HAVING THIS EFFECT, THEY REPORTEDLY FEEL THIS ADDITION TO EGYPT'S AIR POWER COMBINED WITH THE SAUDIS' NEW STRENGTH CAN TIP THE SCALES IN THE ARABS' FAVOR.

5. IN AN EDITORIAL THAT OTHERWISE FOCUSES ON THE WRONGNESS OF SETTLEMENTS AS AN ISSUE (THE REAL QUESTION IS SECURE BORDERS FOR ISRAEL), THE JERUSALEM POST IS ALONE AMONG TO-

DAY'S PAPERS IN LABELING THE CUT IN THE NUMBER OF PLANES PROPOSED FOR ISRAEL AS THE PACKAGE DEAL'S WORST FAULT. THE POST ALSO BELIEVES THAT COMING AT THIS TIME THE DECISION WILL AFFECT ISRAEL ADVERSELY IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT AND THAT IT HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAEL'S AIR-CRAFT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

6. MAARIV NOT ONLY ECHOES THE LATTER REFRAIN BUT IN EMOTIONAL TERMS ALMOST INVOKES ISRAEL'S OLD SIEGE MENTALITY. NOT ONLY CONCERNING ARMS SUPPLIES, BUT RELIANCE ON OUTSIDE ASSURANCES, GUARANTEES, ETC., IS QUESTIONED BY ISRAEL'S LARGEST CIRCULATION DAILY. IT ENDS UP BY CHARGING THE U.S. WITH ADOPTING THE SOVIET ARGUMENT: ARMS TO THE ARABS WILL BOLSTER PEACE IN THE REGION. YEDIOT AHARANOT ALSO ADDS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A NOVEL EXTREME VIEW TO THE DISCUSSION BY SUGGESTING IT MIGHT BE BETTER FOR ISRAEL TO FOREGO THE ADDITIONAL U.S. PLANES IF THIS WOULD CANCEL THE REST OF THE PACKAGE DEAL.

7. COMMENT: DESPITE THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CRITICISM AND THE TONE REFLECTED IN OUR SUMMATIONS, OUR RECOLLECTION IS THAT THE REACTION IS SOMEWHAT LESS STRIDENT THAN WHAT OCCURRED FOLLOWING THE HERCULES SALE TO EGYPT. ONE REASON FOR THE DIFFERENCE PERHAPS IS THAT THE HERCULES SALE WAS SEEN AS THE TRUE PRECEDENT.
LEWIS

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